

XVII.—*Notes on Hirundo rufula and its Allies, with Description of a supposed new Subspecies.* By HENRY SEEBOHM, F.Z.S.

IN 'Stray Feathers' (v. p. 254) Mr. Hume gave an excellent monograph of the Swallows of the subgenus *Littia*. Leaving out the African species, Mr. Hume enumerates nine Asiatic species, of which the range of one extends into South Europe. The points upon which he relies for the discrimination of the species are—(1) the presence or absence of striations on the rump, (2) the fineness or coarseness of the striations on the underparts, (3) the colour and depth of the rump-band, and (4) the size. Of these points all seem to be more or less variable.

Hirundo rufula may always be distinguished by the colour of the rump, which is not uniform chestnut, as in all the other species, but graduates from chestnut next the back to pale buff next the upper tail-coverts. There are no striations on the rump; the chestnut on the nape is well developed; and the striations on the underparts are very narrow. This species breeds in Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine, Persia, Turkestan, and Nepal. There appear to be two forms of it. Examples from Greece, Asia Minor, and Palestine vary in length of wing from 5 to 4·8 inches, whilst examples from Gilgit and Nepal vary from 4·6 to 4·4 inches. One of the most remarkable features of the Swallows appears to be the very small variation in size in each species; and as this difference in size in this case corresponds with a difference of geographical distribution, I propose to call the small eastern form *Hirundo scullii*, or, if we follow the wise example of the American ornithologists in adopting the system of Linnæus, *H. rufula* β . *scullii*.

Of the other species in which the general colour of the rump is uniform, *Hirundo erythropygia* is the most distinct. Its best character is its small size; it has a length of wing of 4·4 to 4·2 inches instead of 5·5 to 4·5 inches. Its next best character is the fineness of the striations of the underparts. These striations are not much more distinct than

those of *H. rufula*, but are decidedly finer than in the much larger *H. alpestris*, and more decidedly so than those of any form of *H. striolata*. The rich dark chestnut of the rump, which, even in birds of the year, scarcely shows a trace of shaft-lines, is another good character. This species is a resident in North-west India.

H. alpestris (of which *H. intermedia* of Hume is a synonym) breeds in South Siberia and winters in Assam. The rump shows only traces of striations; and the striations of the underparts, though much more marked than those of the three forms we have already discussed, are scarcely so much so as in those we shall have to mention afterwards. *H. alpestris* may be divided into two subspecies, not, as in the first species, an eastern and a western form, but a northern and a southern race. The latter may be called *H. alpestris* β . *nipalensis*, and is a colony which has established itself in the Himalayas, wintering in the plains of India and Burma. This local race differs in no respect from its Siberian ally except in size. The Siberian birds vary in length of wing from 5·2 to 4·9 inches, and the Himalayan birds from 4·8 to 4·5 inches.

The remaining form may be allowed to be specifically distinct from the previous two on the ground that the rump is always more striated and the striations of the underparts are more pronounced. This species is called *H. striolata*, and comprehends three local races, which are said to differ only in size. The typical form is a resident in Java, and measures 5·5 inches in length of wing. *H. striolata* β . *substriolata*, is supposed to be a resident in Formosa, occasionally straying in winter to Assam, and measures 5 to 4·8 inches in length of wing; whilst *H. striolata* γ . *japonica* breeds in Japan and South China, and measures 4·6 to 4·4 inches in length of wing. *H. arctivitta* may be the young of *H. japonica*, or an eastern colony of *H. nipalensis*. It breeds at Peking. All the examples of this form in the Swinhoe collections are autumn birds, and differ from *H. japonica* in being very slightly less streaked on the underparts, and in having the chestnut band on the rump less than three quarters of an inch deep, instead of more than an inch. Only one of these

skins appears to be that of an adult bird. I have an Indian skin in which the chestnut band on the rump is equally narrow.

The Asiatic species and subspecies of this subgenus may be diagnosed as under :—

- a.* Colour of rump graduating from chestnut next the back to pale buff next the upper tail-coverts.
 - a'*. Length of wing 5 to 4·8 inches *rufula*.
 - b'*. Length of wing 4·6 to 4·8 inches *rufula* β . *scullii*.
- b.* Colour of rump uniform chestnut.
 - c'*. Striations of underparts nearly as fine as in the preceding species. Length of wing 4·4 to 4·2 inches *erythropygia*.
 - d'*. Striations of underparts coarser than in any of the preceding. Length of wing 4·5 or more.
 - a²*. Striations of underparts intermediate between the preceding and the following species, those of rump almost obsolete.
 - a³*. Length of wing 5·2 to 4·9 inches *alpestris*.
 - b³*. Length of wing 4·8 to 4·5 inches *alpestris* β . *nipalensis*.
 - b²*. Striations of underparts coarser than in any of the preceding, those of rump very distinct.
 - c³*. Length of wing 5·5 inches *striolata*.
 - d³*. Length of wing 5 to 4·8 inches *striolata* β . *substriolata*.
 - e³*. Length of wing 4·6 to 4·4 inches *striolata* β . *japonica*.

XVIII.—*On an Owl from South-east New Guinea, allied to Ninox terricolor, Ramsay, but apparently distinct and undescribed.* By J. H. GURNEY.

THE Norwich Museum has recently obtained, through Mr. Whitely of Woolwich, three specimens of an Owl of the genus *Ninox*, collected by Mr. Goldie in South-eastern New Guinea, which much resembles the species described by Mr. E. P. Ramsay in the 'Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales,' vol. iv. p. 466, under the name of *Ninox terricolor*, but is of considerably larger dimensions than those given by Mr. Ramsay for that species.